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Louisiana Universities Helping Address Teacher Shortage Through Regents Grant Program, Alternative Certification

Five Louisiana public universities are taking advantage of grants from the Louisiana Board of Regents this academic year to help address Louisiana's critical shortage of certified teachers. McNeese State University and Northwestern State University each received first-year grants of \$52,500 to partner with The New Teacher Project, a national nonprofit organization aimed at improving teaching quality.

McNeese and Northwestern join Nicholls State University, the University of Louisiana at Monroe and the University of New Orleans, each in their second year of the program, in using the grants to promote alternative certification programs for degreed professionals who desire to teach. Each university is working with its local school districts to fill teaching vacancies in critical shortage areas such as math, science, special education and middle school education.

"One of the most significant barriers to academic success for students in our state is the lack of qualified teachers in many of our classrooms, particularly in our most economically-disadvantaged districts," said Commissioner of Higher Education Joseph Savoie. "Thanks to the work of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Teacher Quality and the faculties and administrations of our colleges of education around the state, Louisiana's alternative certification programs are now making it possible for professionals in other disciplines to receive their teaching credentials and move into the classroom in the most efficient manner possible. Through the New Teacher Project partnership, these institutions are attracting new teacher candidates in record numbers, and that's excellent news for our state."

According to Meredyth Hudson, Regional Director for the New Teacher Project, over 200 non-traditional, eligible participants for the Practitioner Teacher Programs were identified in the first year of the recruitment initiative - in addition to alternative

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Universities Address Teacher Shortage ADD ONE

certification participants currently teaching in school systems. Perhaps even more encouragingly, 84% of the program participants are pursuing certification in high-need areas such as math, science, and special education.

This year, only partway through the recruitment season, nearly 2000 individuals have expressed interest through various recruitment efforts, and the programs have received hundreds of applications statewide.

“Participants are bringing demonstrated records of achievement to the classroom,” said Hudson. “New teachers have been recruited directly from careers such as law, healthcare, engineering, and social services. ”

Hudson said the universities are still seeking interested candidates to enroll in the program this year. To be eligible for these alternative certification programs, all participants are required to pass Praxis I and Praxis II Content Area exams. More importantly, potential participants need to register by February 10 to take the appropriate Praxis tests on the next available test date -- March 6, 2004.

Individual program application deadlines are as follows:

University of Louisiana at Monroe: Feb. 1, 2004 (early); March 1, 2004 (final)
Nicholls State University: March 12, 2004
McNeese State University: March 15, 2004
Northwestern State University: March 31, 2004
University of New Orleans: March 31, 2004

The New Teacher Project is a non-profit consulting organization that partners with school districts, states and other educational entities to enhance their capacity to recruit, select, train, and support outstanding new teachers. The New Teacher Project has attracted and prepared over 10,000 new, high-quality teachers and launched 39 programs in 19 states since 1997. In addition to its work in Louisiana, The New Teacher Project is currently working with school districts in New York City; Washington D.C.; Atlanta; and Baltimore, among others.

